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ABSTRACT

This study examined the differences in reading and mathematics achievement and the discipline records of eighth grade students who lived with both of their biological parents and those who did not. Participating were 199 eighth grade middle school students in rural Georgia. The 103 students in the traditionally parented group came from their original, biological two-parent family. The 96 students in the non-traditionally parented group consisted of students whose home life differed in any way from that of the traditional group. Findings indicated that mathematics achievement on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) did not differ between the two groups. Students from two-parent families scored higher on the ITBS Reading Achievement and had fewer behavior infractions over the course of the year than students from non-traditional families. (Contains 47 references.) (Author/KB)

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THE EFFECTS OF NON-TRADITIONAL FAMILIES ON SCHOOL BEHAVIOR AND ITBS READING AND MATH SCORES OF EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if there would be a statistically significant difference between the discipline records and ITBS scores of students who live with both of their biological parents and those discipline records and ITBS scores of students who did not. This study was completed using 199 eighth grade middle school students in rural Middle Georgia. The traditionally parented group numbered 103 and was made of students who came from their original two parent family. The non-traditional parented numbered 96 and consisted of students whose home life differed in any way from that of the control group. An Intact-Group comparison research design was used. The t-test revealed there was a significant difference in the reading ITBS scores and behavior records of students from traditional family configurations versus non-traditional family configurations. There was no significant difference in the math ITBS scores of the students from traditional family configurations versus non-traditional family configurations.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The family is among the oldest and most fundamental of human institutions. It consists of a man and a woman who are generally expected to produce children, care for them, and help train them in the ways of their culture (Grolier, 1992). This definition of the simple family is present in almost all known societies. Today it is still the attitude held by the large majority of Americans.

America has deep roots that support ideas and expectations of the nuclear family that date back to the time of the colonists. As they flocked to the shores of our emerging country, they brought with them the attitude that the family was responsible for framing children's ideas about the world and how they ought to behave in it. The church was to carry a lesser role by establishing the moral teachings and the schools were to limit their teaching to the subjects of reading and writing (Kagan, 94).

As our country continued to grow, immigrants arrived from all over the world to begin a new and improved life. Often, they arrived with nothing but the clothing they wore. The government increased funding of basic natural human services throughout the nation in order to care for those individuals who were making our country their home. The trend set the precedence that soon became the expected pattern of behavior of our government toward it's population. Social services would care for those who needed help and education would be for all. The education of our nations population is now guaranteed by the

Constitution's ninth amendment (Klinker,1991).

Today, we have accepted that there is a difference between the two worlds-- home and school. Children however, must move back and forth from the home to the school environment. Both parents and teachers agree that there is a common goal to create well educated and well-loved children. The two groups must also realize that a whole variety of social problems are present. These problems hinder the schools from doing the job they were originated to complete (Rosenthal & Sawyers, 1996).

Many of the children we teach today do not come from the traditional family setting. They arrive each day bringing in their baggage the knowledge of drugs, alcohol, divorce, abuse and homelessness. The problems faced by today's child are vastly different from those of days gone by.

Current data indicates that fewer than 70% of the young people in the United States will graduate from high school; minority children have even lower graduation rates (Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny & Pardo, 1992). Schools must consider these percentages and ask what can be done? If the breakdown of the traditional family is to blame for a large percentage of the student's problem, then what role should the educational system of this country now play in a child's development? Should schools encourage parent involvement or attempt to handle the education of the child all on it's own?

Evidence continues to grow showing that teamwork and collaboration are more likely to achieve positive results than when the family unit and school system work alone. Researchers are stating that

parent involvement appears to have a direct impact on student achievement. (Henderson,1987; Marcon,1993; Rotter, Robinson & Frey, 1987; Seldin, 1991). Teachers are now rating parent involvement as a top priority for improving education.

What educators must realize is that families are changing. The scenario of the traditional, original, biological parents raising their children together is fast approaching extinction. The non-traditional family is quickly becoming the norm in today's American society. This change is being identified by teachers as a major cause of dysfunction among youth and perhaps unconsciously wish for the return of the original married couple with their own children as the preferred family structure (Ball, Newman, & Scheuren, 1984; Mack,1992). Divorce American style, young single women rearing children without fathers in the home, and unmarried couples with dependent children are family structures that educators must accept into their consciousness (Weed, 1982). The non-traditional family is here to stay.

Educators must consider how the student is going to be affected by these non-traditional families? Already, middle school educators are linking the pressures and losses associated with the change in family structure and risk-taking behavior of youths. Documented research shows that at least one-half of middle grade students first started smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and experimenting with illegal drugs while they were still in middle school (Johnson, O'Malley, & Buchman, 1988). One of the most alarming things about this information, among many, is that the teens did not stop after their

explorations. In fact, since consequences or reprimands for their behavior did not occur, the behavior continued when ignored by school personnel and parents. These behaviors then became a part of their lives through addictive behavior.

A recent study (Casey, 1994) says that nearly four million children are growing up under conditions that threaten their futures. These children live in "severely distressed neighborhoods" that feature high incidence of poverty, female-headed families, high school drop-outs, unemployment, and reliance on welfare. When a child grows up in an environment where drugs, violence, welfare, and teen pregnancy are more prevalent than the safe schools, high school diplomas, and good jobs, what do we expect from our students? These at risk students are also often identified as behavioral or discipline problems.

Family factors such as unstable family conditions, low social/economic status, low education of parents, limited English proficiency, and being a member of a minority culture all indicate poor grades, low performance on basic skills tests, and below grade level performance in the classroom (DePauw, 1987). When a student feels inadequate due to any of the family factors mentioned above, he or she is very likely to be disruptive or act out in a classroom due to their anger over their personal status in the community.

In our own small rural community, the local CARE cottage is designed to serve children who are abused, neglected or caught up in a parent's arrest. As the director, Gail Kitchens, reports "children who witness violence get into a pattern of perpetuating violence. They act out

violently at school and we get more cases of this than actual child abuse" (Kitchens,1997). The at-risk student is identified with behavioral and discipline problems. When the student does not perform academically, teachers often assume that these students are lazy or unmotivated (Ruff, 1993). O'Sullivan (1989) correlated low teacher ratings and low self expectations with academic failure and behavior problems in at-risk middle school students. Many of these students feel that they are destined to fail by their teachers preconceived ideas of their abilities based on their family backgrounds.

School systems must develop specialized programs to help these at-risk students. The needs seem clear. They may need special academic help to overcome basic skills deficiencies and to succeed in the content area classroom. Students need to be kept with their peers and retentions should be rare. When a student is successful in the classroom, he or she develops a positive self concept and academic attitude. It is at this point that behavior problems decrease and test scores increase.

Schools are in the business of producing a product. Hopefully, the end product will be a student who has made the most of their educational opportunity. The school can not sit by and wait for the solutions to come from the community and the student's home. Our students must be prepared to compete in a world that does not accommodate someone because of their past at-risk family associations. Schools must initiate curriculum changes in order to handle these masses of at-risk children entering their education programs yearly who

are quickly becoming the majority and not the minority.

Statement of the Problem

Is there a significant difference between the behavior records and ITBS scores of eighth grade middle school students who have experienced a family life other than that of their two original biological parents versus those who have been raised in their biological, two-parent home environment?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine if there is a significant difference between behavior records and ITBS reading and math scores of seventh and eighth grade middle school students who have been raised in a nontraditional family setting and those behavior records and ITBS reading and math scores of seventh and eighth grade middle school students who have been raised in a traditional family setting.

Statement of the Hypothesis

There will be no significant difference between the behavior records and ITBS scores of seventh and eighth grade middle school students from nontraditional families and those students who live in traditional two parent families.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of terms used within this research project. These definitions are necessary in the understanding of whether or not the traditional family has a positive or negative influence on behavior records and ITBS scores of middle school students.

DEFACS

Department of Education Family and Children Services.

Discipline

The school has one principal and two assistant principals. Teachers may choose to discipline students by assigning silent lunch, assigning after school detention, calling parents, arranging parent conferences, sending students to other classrooms or sending students to the office.

ITBS

The Iowa Test of Basic Skills is a nation wide test given to students of all ages. It is in eighth grade that the scores are compared to other students in the nation taking the test. The scores are used by teachers when considering the placement of students in reading and math classes.

Middle grade students

The middle grade students used in this research attend the school from the sixth grade through the eighth grade. The school is only six years old and was built as a technologically complete facility.

The middle school

The facility was first used six years ago. Computers are in each classroom for the teacher's use. A computer lab is provided for teachers to use with their students. The school was first built to house 1000 students. In 1997, the total student population was 873. Four mobile classrooms are in use at present time. Plans are in the works for additional classrooms to be built in the near future.

Middle school team concept

The middle school team concept assigns a group of students to a team of teachers. That two-person, three-person, or four-person group of teachers will then arrange schedules for those students. Those students that comprise that team will be taught by those specific teachers for the academic year. This idea was initiated in order for the teachers to have time to learn about their individual students and become more personally involved in their lives. A greater rapport was established between student and teacher because each teacher was responsible for fewer students.

Traditional family

The traditional family consists of two biological parents and their children, determined by an information form filled out at the beginning of the school year, that was signed by the student and a parent or guardian.

Non-traditional family

The nontraditional family consists of any type of living arrangement a child has other than living with their two biological parents, determined by an information form filled out at the beginning of the school year, that was signed by the student and a parent or guardian.

Limitations

Students from nontraditional families had a variety of home environments. It is impossible to calculate the effect various family make up might have had on the individual students. Consideration

should also be given to the length of time the study was completed. Over the course of a school year, family make up may change. This would not necessarily be reflected in the data. Although some students were from two parent situations, those may have been dysfunctional.

Significance of the Study

Field research should provide insight into causal relations which might effect the students success in school. This research will help to determine if a students family background has positive or negative influence on his or her behavior and test scores. If a correlation is discovered, educators, school districts, and colleges need to take into consideration those effects and be prepared to deal with students in those situation in a different manner to encourage the students to maximize their educational potential.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Introduction

Family structure has changed over the past years. These alterations are associated with the emotional adjustment of young adolescents.

> "More than 1.5 million children under the age of 18 are affected each year by family breakups, and nearly half of the children born in 1980 will live in single-parent families at some point before they reach 18. Furthermore, in 1987, the census Bureau reported that over half of the babies born that year would spend part of their childhood in one-parent families." (Berger; as cited in Adams, 1989 p. 5)

The divorce trend will continue given the growing population. Schools must learn to adjust to the needs of these children (Adams, Miller, & Reavis, 1989). The extent, of these deviations from the norm, is increasingly questioned by recent test scores and behavior records.

Literature Review

Effects of Family Structure on Academic Performance

It is easy to understand how younger students may be effected by the parental structure of their homes. Several researchers have looked not only at younger students but also at high school students. The purpose of Sears (1995) was to measure the difference in achievement of high school students from single-parent homes compared to those from intact homes. The study was limited to one school district in Texas and

had a sample of 52 junior and senior students. Grades from English and Math were recorded. Two groups were identified as two parent (n=32) and single parent (n=20) families. Using a *t* -test, the two student groups were compared to discover the significance of difference in grade between the two. A difference was discovered in English, but no significant differences in math means (Sears, 1995).

In a survey study done by Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, and Freleigh (1987), the subjects were 7,836 adolescents enrolled in six high schools in the San Francisco Bay area. This number comprised 88% of the student population of those schools in the Spring of 1985. They found that both authoritarian and permissive parenting styles had a negative link with grades and authoritative parenting was positively associated with grades.

Single mothers showed a higher level of permissive parenting than did two-natural-parents. For their sons only, single mothers showed lower levels of authoritarian parenting when compared to households containing both natural parents. Single fathers were also more permissive for both sexes, while they were less authoritative for males than families containing both natural parents.

Step-families, compared to families with two natural parents, were likely to be more permissive, especially for males. Of the 24 comparisons, between two natural parent families and other types of families, 12 were statistically significant (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Freleigh,1987).

In 1988, a study authored by Daniel Nommay (1988) 14 descriptors

were used to study the effect of family structure on intelligence and academic achievement over the last 15 years. Although there were some inconsistencies, his findings cited an absence of an adult family member would and did show a decrease in scholastic achievement. A decrease in educational attainment and lower National Merit Scholarship scores were also present (Nommay, 1988).

The relation of family structure, gender, and family environment to academic performance and school behavior was studied in 1988 by Kurdek and Sinclair. Their purpose was to assess how academic performance and school behavior were related to the family make up of 219 middle-class eighth graders. Ninety-six boys and 123 girls were used in the study.

When looking at the end-of-the-year grades, students from two-parent nuclear families had higher grades than did the students in either mother-custody or stepfather families. Higher quantitative factor scores and fewer absences from school were characteristics of students from two-parent nuclear families.

Overall, the students in two-parent nuclear families had better academic performance and less problematic school behavior than did students in either mother custody or stepfather families. Some gender differences appeared in that males had more detention than did females but academically did not perform more poorly than the girls from father-absent families (Kurdek & Sinclair, 1988).

Kraig in 1989 studied the differences in the levels of achievement of tenth grade students from one and two parent homes (Kraig, 1989).

This study collected data from a California high school using the entire 10th grade population. It took into consideration not only the home environment but also the ethnic background of the student and it's family income.

When controls were inserted for family income the results concluded that there were no significant differences in the academic achievement levels in any of the areas tested between male and female students of white, Hispanic or black origin. There were significant differences among the achievement levels from differing ethnic groups and a lower familial income (Kraig, 1989).

Results indicating that the educational performance of males and females differed with respect to the type of familial configuration were reported by Feldman and Rafferty in 1993. They used an ethnographic study of ninth graders in a urban public school to take their random sample of 120 high school freshmen and looked at four variables for each student. In their study, the presence of the mother in the home was variable one. Variable two involved the father's presence in the home. Variable three calculated the presence of other adults. Variable four considered the existence of other children in the home.

The pair summarized that in homes without fathers, females appear to perform the poorest in educational achievement. Males, however, performed best in those family groups where the mother and/or maternal relations were present. Contrary to expectation, males performed best in family configurations where the father was absent (Feldman & Rafferty, 1993).

Grissmer, Kirby, Berends and Williamson (1994) studied trends in math and reading achievement during the period 1970/75-1990. They wanted to see if the changing family and demographic characteristics would influence test scores. Using a survey, they discovered that the most significant family characteristics associated with test scores were parental education levels, family income, family size and the age of the mother at birth.

Some of the specific discoveries involved the significant factors of the education levels and the reduction in family size. Working mothers had very little impact on scores when all other variables were equal. Although family income was strongly associated with test scores. The family income had not changed significantly during those twenty years (1994).

Grissmer, Kirby, Berends, and Williamson (1994) in their study concluded that the school system had not deteriorated since the 1950's-1960's and the system was making significant progress in decreasing educational inequalities for minorities.

The economic hardships suffered by children of divorced parents and those in families with a single custodial parent are well documented. The Finn and Owings (1994) study of 14,577 nationwide eighth graders attempted to make direct comparisons of the academic performance of eighth grade students raised by both natural parents with youngsters raised in single-parent and step-parent families. They wanted to find out if the school performance was related to the family structure or attributed to the variables which surround that family structure. Finn

and Owings gave special attention to the effects of poverty and ethnicity.

This study examined the range of family types, including natural parent families, step families, single parent homes with mother only or father only. Also taken into consideration was the school performance based in the four areas of reading, math, history, and science.

Out of their sample, about 65% were living with intact family settings with mother only being the most common alternative (about 18%). Fewer than 3% of youngsters were living with a father and stepmother, and about 2% were living with their fathers alone (Finn & Owings, 1994).

When examining the results without conditions, the most consistent decrements were found for youngsters just living with their mothers and girls in a mother-stepfather family. The single mother effect disappeared when race and SES were controlled. No significant differences between youngsters living with their mothers and those living in intact families were found either for males or females in the set of four achievement measures or for any measure separately. The effect sizes for youngsters living with their mothers, controlling for race and SES, were minuscule (1994).

Finn and Owings' results emphasize the importance of controlling for race and socioeconomic status when attempting to understand how home environments impact school outcomes. Intervening variables such as family income and parent's education are translated into their children's educational achievement (Finn & Owings, 1994).

In an early study by Thompson, Alexander, and Entwisle (1988),

825 Boston City first graders were examined. The group wanted to see if the dramatic changes in family structures over the last decade had any influence on school achievement. They expected to see the largest difference in the students from families with only a mother. They wanted to know how family configuration might affect children's life chances, and school progress (Thompson, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1988).

Using a school process model, their analyses showed that household composition did have an important influence on teachers' marks particularly in reading. If there is a second adult, not just the father, there were beneficial effects on reading marks. Households exert their effects on first grade achievement primarily by way of parent expectations for reading marks (Thompson, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1988).

The findings of Forehand, Long, Brody and Fauber (1986) cite greater disruptive, disturbances of adolescent school performance when a father conflict arises. When an adolescent's grades fall, fathers may assume the responsibility for improving school performance, which may lead to more conflicts. Regardless of the cause-effect sequence, the primary significance is that adolescents' interactions with their fathers were significantly related to academic performance and school behavior (Forehand, Long, Brody & Fauber, 1986).

The effects of divorce on the achievement of seventh grade students was researched by Adams, Miller, Reavis (1989). The group hypothesized that parental divorce would alter the achievement (Adams, Miller, Reavis, & Reglin, 1989). They had two subject groups of 30 each which

were randomly chosen students from a middle school in North Carolina. Family structure was the independent variable. Achievement on the California Achievement test was used to determine any significance. Comparing the groups on achievement, analysis showed no significant difference ($t = 1.45$; $p < .15$).

From the research reviewed students from the traditional family did show a greater academic achievement than did the students from nontraditional families. Factors that are illustrated by the research make it clear that many variables may influence the success or failure of the student from any type of family setting.

Effects of Family Structure on Behavioral Performance

Historically, it has been the family who prepared children to enter the social world of school. Parents spend the preschool developmental years teaching skills such as sharing, listening, respect, and manners and stressing the skills that a proper education is designed to teach. These behaviors have ultimately set the stage for those that occur outside the home.

Schools have discipline rules which focus on two main goals: (1) ensure the safety of staff and students, and (2) create an environment conducive to learning. Serious student misconduct defeats these goals (Gaustad, 1992). Do schools have fewer discipline problems if the majority of student population is derived from intact families?

In 1986, the purpose of a study by Forehand, Long, Brody, and Fauber was to examine the association between home variables and young adolescents' school behavior and performance. They used 46

mother-father-adolescent triads. The ages ranged from 11.5 years to 14.9 years (Forehand, Long, Brody & Fauber, 1986).

The research team felt that both school achievement and social functioning especially among young adolescents appeared to be related to the relationship between parent and child. They also recognized the lack of literature dealing with the subject.

To obtain their data, the research group used teacher-completed assessments of internalizing and externalizing problems by the adolescent. Students used in the study were from families that included a head of the household who was generally educated and worked in skilled occupations. All of the families were intact and consisted of the biological mother and father (Forehand, Long, Brody & Fauber, 1986).

In Lee, Zimiles, Ladewski, & Burkam, (1991) a study was used to gauge the effects of divorce and remarriage on the emotional adjustment of young adolescents. The group took into consideration family structure, dependent measures of behavioral or emotional problems, and demographic variables. Gender, race, ethnicity, mother's age, socioeconomic status and number of siblings were statistical controls that were also considered.

They found that school-related behavioral problems were between two and four times as likely in single-parent or step-families as in intact families. Parent-reported emotional problems of children were more common among nontraditional family structures. Eighth graders were at least as likely to experience problems in households occupied by step families as in single parent households. Also, children of this age were

particularly susceptible to emotional problems if they were not living with their biological mothers.

A study by Sears in 1995 reported that once the discipline referrals of all 52 of their sample were tabulated and the means compared. There were significant differences in discipline (Sears, 1995).

Allison and Furstenberg, (1989) found that children who experienced a marital dissolution had significantly larger problems with respect to several measures of behavior as well as academic performance and psychological distress. These differences were observed in reports from parents, teachers and the children themselves. The study also examined how the effects of divorce vary with sex and age of the child and whether the custodial parent remarries. Age and sex seemed to make some difference, but remarriage did not. They found no interactions between marital dissolution and any of the background factors that were controlled in their present study, thus the dissolution differentials did not appear to differ by race, mother's religion, mother's education, mother's age at the birth of the child, the child's birth order, or region of residence.

According to Thompson, Entwisle, Alexander and Sundius (1992) children's conduct marks in first grade for children from father-present homes are generally higher than those for children from either solo-mother or mother-extended families, but not significantly. Improvement in conduct marks over first grade was assessed by logistic regressions using the PROBIT procedure from SPSSX version 3.1. The results showed that the conduct marks of children who came from father-

present homes improved significantly over the year. The regression showed that these changes were significant when evaluated against changes in marks of children from solo mother homes ($p < .05$).

In a comprehensive review of research on one-parent households, Hetherington, Camara, and Leatherman (1983) found that children from single mother households had higher rates of absenteeism, tardiness, and truancy and had more disruptive classroom behaviors, problem referrals and suspensions than did children from two parent homes.

Another study by Brown found that, students from the one parent family configurations depict only one-fourth of the school population. Yet, they are suspended twice as often in the elementary grades as students living in two parents family configurations, and they involve nearly 40% of the high school suspension cases (Brown, 1980).

Research shows "the main problem seen in boys whose fathers are absent is the manifestation of "excessive masculine" traits, which frequently are expressed through delinquent behavior" (Morgan, 1985 in Adams, 1985 p. 9). Adams, Miller, Reavis and Reglin (1989) simply states that in conclusion of their study, comparing the two groups of 30 on behavior, their research showed that divorce had a statistically significant effect on behavior in school ($t = -3.61$; $p < .001$). Therefore the general picture suggests that single parents are not as effective as those in two parent homes in helping youngsters comply with the student roles.

In a study by Featherstone, Cundick, and Jensen (1992), there were 530 students in grades six through nine selected from two schools

within Salt Lake City Utah composed the sample population. The schools were chosen throughout the area to ensure a random socioeconomic sample. A control group of 293 students were randomly chosen from an alphabetical listing. This group came from intact families. There were 159 students from single-parent families, and 78 from reconstituted families. Subjects ranged from 11 to 17 years, with an average age of 13.8 (Featherstone, Cundick, & Jensen, 1992).

The computer-generated Jordan School District Office Report was used to compile the necessary sample selection and statistical analysis (Featherstone, Cundick, & Jensen, 1992). From this report, all pertinent information was collected. School attendance and behavior ratings were used in the comparison of the three groups.

Unsurprisingly, the results ranked the students from intact families with higher teacher behavioral ratings, lower absences and tardies. Students from single-parent families or reconstituted families had more problems in the areas of behavior, absences and tardies (Featherstone, Cundick, & Jensen, 1992).

The support of a two-parent intact family is far reaching. The student who comes from an intact family is provided with two role models. Whether the student is female or male, the ability to witness both parents' behaviors in everyday situations and the knowledge that certain expectations are held by those parents does seem to make a difference.

Effects of Family Structure on Students' Goals

Zimiles and Lee (1991) decided to do a follow up study of a sophomore class during their senior year. They continued to look at the gender, the SAT scores, and the family make-up. Again they discovered that students from step-families and single-parent families lag behind those from intact families. Students from step-families and single parent families are almost three times as likely to leave high school before graduation as are those from intact families. This trend continued even after the socioeconomic backgrounds and ability differences were taken into account.

Barber and Eccles (1992) examined the possible long-term influences of both divorce and living with a single mother on the development of adolescents' values and plans. They point out that although numerous reviews have examined charges that divorce has a strong negative influence on children, existing evidence is conflicting.

Child outcomes depend on factors such as the age and sex of the child, length of time in a single-parent family, family economic resources, and parental conflict before and after the divorce. They point out that although some children exhibit disruptions in development, others adjust with skill.

In fact, the evidence seems to be converging to the point that children in single-mother families are not as different from children in two-parent families as traditionally believed and that individual differences within groups are generally much larger than differences between groups.

Further observations of individual differences may tell a great deal

about the processes involved in adjustment to family transitions. Finally, even when convincing differences between family types appear, it is often not clear whether these differences should be interpreted as positive, neutral, or negative outcomes.

Thompson, Alexander, and Entwisle (1988) discovered that in cases where the father was absent, but there was another adult, the adverse effects, in some of the ethnic homes, were lessened. Parents in mother-father households hold higher expectations for their child's reading performance than do parents in one-parent homes. Social support of adverse situations may account for positive academic outcomes.

The data from a 1986 study by Guidubaldi, Parry, and Nastasi, indicated that students from intact two-parent home did have a higher GPA. Their study also demonstrated that children from father-present intact homes had higher performance levels on social competence criteria and academics than did those from single-parent families. From this research and others cited here, it appears that educationally favorable goals are associated with family status.

When a child lives in a two-parent intact family, that child knows that social norms and expectations of society support that family tradition. If that traditional family setting changes to a non-traditional one or if the child had never even experienced a traditional setting, that student may wonder how society will except them as individuals based on their home environment. Will the perceptions of individuals such as teachers and administrators influence the students academic and

behavior success in school?

Effects of Teacher Perceptions of Students' Family Structure and the Relationship to Student Academics and Student Behavior

While youngsters from one-parent families may enter school less well prepared and perform poorly as a consequence, household effects are most consistently obtained on subjective rather than objective sources of evaluation.

Similar to achievement, the assessment of behavior is subject to teacher expectations. In Fuller's study, it was shown that teacher expectations varied according to the age of the teacher. Findings indicated those teachers over 35 were more extreme in attributing negative behavior to children from single parent families. Teachers under 35 were more likely to attribute more positive behaviors to these same children (Fuller, 1986). This study seemed to indicate a possible bias because of teacher expectations.

It appears that teachers may hold negative expectations for children from one-parent families (Santrock & Tracy, 1978; Thompson, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1988). It also seems that teachers rate children from one-parent homes more negatively on homework completion and study skills than they relate children from two-parent homes. Such attitudes may be important in cognitive development because teachers are a key source of rewards and punishments (Thompson, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1988).

The research group discovered that complicating variables such as race and SES may influence the relationship between one-parent

households and achievement. Because of these variables, the group identified 20 variables in their model. The results exhibited household compositions did have an influence on school achievement and in particular on teachers' marks. These influences were present in a larger degree in verbal scores rather and to a less significant degree in mathematical scores (Thompson, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1988).

Each year, teachers are introduced to their classroom students with seemingly unbiased opinions of each individual. Or is it the case that some biased opinions do exist? According to the research, there are examples of teachers who may feel that students from intact families do perform better academically and socially. Since it is an opinion from the teacher that is being measured, one must be careful to realize that accurate measuring of attitudes is difficult.

A teacher who has been working in the profession for many years may have preconceived ideas about students based upon experience. The ratings given to a student may also be partially based on that prior knowledge and not necessarily the student in question. We must be careful when reviewing data that is collected through surveys for these reasons.

Summary

The need for effective parent-teacher partnerships is greater now than ever before. In the past generation, both the internal and external environments of schools have witnessed unprecedented changes. These changes have brought with them demands for restructuring the traditional model of schooling. At the same time, the task of parenting

has been presented with new challenges and pitfalls (Renihan & Renihan, 1995).

"It is predicted that the number of single parent children will continue to rise by one million each year" (Roy & Fuga, 1983 p. 183). Given this growth potential, other variables do demand attention in the research; family status, income, and mobility were all strongly influential factors in the literature (Adams, Miller, & Reavis, 1989).

Schools and families both educate and socialize children. It has taken many years for people to realize that there has to be a large overlap if the two are going to produce successful students. In the past, and sometimes today, if students fail, the school blames the parent and the parent blames the school, but if students succeed both claim responsibility. These new perceptions have made us begin to look at the structure of the school and of the family.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Population

Eighth grade students from a rural middle Georgia school were chosen as subjects for the study. These students had experienced the middle school concept for at least one full year before the research began. We wanted the study group to have a complete feel for the team concept. Because of this, the sixth grade was not chosen for the study; also, we did not want to develop any preconceived ideas about future students that might be assigned to our teams in future years. We also perceived that being sixth graders, they had not had ample time to understand the team concept. We did not use the seventh grade because that is what we both were presently teaching and we wanted our research to remain as objective as possible.

The population consisted of 199 total students. Group A contained 96 students living in a non -traditional family setting and Group B contained 103 students from a traditional two parent family. These students were all eighth grade students in a rural middle school in central Georgia.

Sample

The sample Group A consisted of 96 students from non traditional families. The Group B sample consisted of 103 students from their biological two parent families. These students had previously been randomly selected by the school administrators for their division into the three teams used in the research data. There were twelve individual

classes used to compile the data.

Instruments

To collect our behavioral data, we designed a chart using the Claris Works 4.0 data base. On the chart we had divisions for the students name, each of the six weeks, ITBS Reading and Math scores, and Gender. As the year progressed, each record was updated to include the most recent information.

To gather academic achievement in reading and math, we used the scores from the ITBS test taken during the spring of 1997. According to The Eleventh Mental Measurements Yearbook (1992), the ITBS, when assessed by materials contained in Detailed Skills Objectives With Item Norms, shows that the ITBS content validity is "excellent" and the estimates of reliability are "quite good". "Most of the equivalent-forms reliability coefficients for the tests range from .70 - .90. Most of the internal-consistency reliability (K-R20) coefficients are above .85" (Kramer 1992).

Tasks and Materials

Using a Macintosh computer and a Claris Works data base, we constructed a list that included the name of each student in the seventh and eight grade, each of the six weeks, the team number, the grade number, the sex, the race, the reading and math ITBS scores and the traditional and nontraditional information. As the year progressed, behavior data was entered. This data was taken from the office referral report that each team received at the end of each six weeks. Data concerning the type of family background of each student came from the

parent information forms each parent must complete after the first day of that school year. At the end of the year, records were sorted and organized by family type and behavior. An SPSS statistical computer package, provided by Mercer University Education Department, was used to run a t-test. ITBS scores and family type were then compared.

Procedures

At the start of the 1996 -1997 school year, team teachers were asked if they would participate in the research project. All were very cooperative and said that they would. The principal and assistant principals were consulted before work was begun. It was determined that all student names would remain confidential in the research report. To prevent team teachers from any bias, they were not told which information would be utilized, nor the manner in which the data would be used. The research topic was not divulged until the end of the academic year.

When we began this study, we wanted to discover if the home life had an influence on a students school life and if it did, in what ways might the student be effected. Yearly, we are faced with free lunch forms, meetings with DEFACS, and an increasing knowledge of dysfunctional family units. Our attempt was to determine at what depth these problems might determine the success or failure of the educational system.

Data was collected throughout the year and compiled after the last 6 weeks discipline record had been reported. Any student who came into the system during the year was omitted from the project. Students who

were missing ITBS reading and math scores were omitted. Students who had a change in family circumstances were also eliminated. Students who had severe behavior disorders and were served by the behavior disorder class for more than five hours weekly were also omitted from the project.

CHAPTER IV

Results and Discussion

Data Analysis

This research examined the effects of a non-traditional family on the discipline record of eighth grade students and their ITBS scores. All students were from the same rural public school in middle Georgia. The total population of the students used in the research was 199. There were 96 from nontraditional families and 103 from traditional families.

Method of Data Analysis

The purpose of this research was to determine if there was a $p < .05$ level of significance between the family environment when compared to the variables of behavior records, ITBS Reading scores, and ITBS Math scores. In order to show this significance, three separate two tailed *t* - tests were used.

Analysis of Findings

Test one compared the reading scores from the ITBS to the type of family the student was from. With equal variances assumed, the test showed a $p < .002$ level of significance. Keeping the variable in mind, the test showed that there was a difference in reading scores between the non-traditional family and the traditional family student.

With equal variances assumed, the second test compared data from ITBS math scores and familial configurations. The results showed a $p < .125$. Using this variable, there was no significant difference between the non-traditional family student and the traditional family student.

Behavior of students from a non-traditional family versus a traditional family was the variable in test three. Assuming that there are equal variances, there was a $p < .017$ level of significance in the third test. This result led us to the conclusion that there is a significant difference between the behavior of a traditional family student and a non traditional family student.

Table 1

Test One

1. Level of Significance in Reading ITBS scores related to the family configuration. . . . .

Var	*n*	mean	*t*	*df*	Sig. 2-tailed
1 parent family	96	47.4688	-3.102	197	.002
2 parent family	103	60.3010	-3.086	188.134	.002

Table 2

Test Two

2. Level of Significance in Math ITBS scores related to the family configuration. . . . . .

Var	*n*	mean	*t*	*df*	Sig. 2-tailed
1 parent family	96	47.4688	-1.541	197	.125
2 parent family	103	60.3010	-1.536	191.968	.126

Table 3

Test Three

3. Level of Significance in Behavior infractions related to the family configuration . . . . . .

Var	*n*	mean	*t*	*df*	Sig. 2-tailed
1 parent family	96	47.4688	2.414	197	.017
2 parent family	103	60.3010	2.404	190.334	.017

CHAPTER V

Summary and Conclusions

The results of this study, as anticipated, show that there is a significant difference between the behavior records and ITBS scores of eighth grade middle school students from non-traditional families and those students who live in traditional two parent families. Math scores; however, do not seem to be influenced by the family configuration of the child.

The results of this study were not totally unexpected. The discovery that math ITBS scores did not show a significance difference between the groups was a little enlightening although the previous research by Sears (1995) supported this finding.

The lack of significance in that area could be explained by examining the significance in the reading content. The family is the first contact a child has with reading. The skills built in the home through parents reading to their children, modeling their own reading and support given to the fledging beginnings of letter recognition all encourage the child. If these skills are not demonstrated or explored in the home, the child enters school behind the other students who have had the support.

Math is most often learned rather differently from reading. Parents may use math around their children when dealing with paying bills, or when visiting a store, but do not incorporate the child into this use. Rarely are math topics built into conversations and parents seldom try to explain or even encourage the child to participate in such matters.

The child may pick up on some of the smaller concepts such as memorizing numbers and learning to count but the larger ideas behind mathematics are left up to the teachers.

A large majority of students enter school all on the same math level. Within a short amount of time, the skills needed can be learned in school without much home support needed. Math is most often used in the home out of basic necessity, and parents do not expect the same level of learning from their children in the math arena as they do with reading.

As we collected data from team teachers, the discussion of families was a hot topic. The attitudes of our colleagues was one of concern, amazement, and outrage of the family conditions that 45% of our students came from on a daily basis. Although each teacher was very empathetic toward those students, they felt unprepared to deal with those situations. College courses had not prepared them for the teaching of students from dysfunctional families. They needed concrete ideas that could be utilized in the classroom to motivate those who seemed least likely to succeed academically.

The family is quickly becoming extinct as the dinosaur. As educators, we can not stick our head in the sand and expect the situation to improve. The "Ozzie and Harriet" days are not going to reappear. Our attitude toward these children in the school system must change. They are not responsible for their family configuration. The results of research, such as this, should be utilized to train educators to realize that a student's undesirable behavior could be because of the

influence of their family structure.

The pre-K program is attempting to give all students an equal beginning. By providing early instruction in the basic skills, school systems are hoping to take these children from deprived backgrounds and give them the necessary tools they will need in order to have a positive future in the school system.

At the middle school level, we are in serious need of services for young people from non-traditional families. The classroom curriculum must include more than just the subject area instruction. We must educate the entire child.

In future studies, an attempt should be made to uncover some of the specific variables that interfere with the student's ability to experience success in the classroom. Home environments and the role of the parent should also be explored with the expectations of using that information to develop school/family partnership programs. Realizing the importance of the home/family partnership might encourage school districts and legislative bodies to appropriate necessary monies for more counselors and added programs that deal with these issues.

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